



CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND CLIMATE CHANGE



WHAT IS CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING?

“Catholic social teaching is a central and essential element of our faith. Its roots are in the Hebrew prophets who announced God’s special love for the poor and called God’s people to a covenant of love and justice.” (<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/>)

Catholic Social Teaching is the body of Church doctrine that describes how Catholics are called to transform the world by proclaiming and living the Gospel. Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated by a variety of Church authorities. The U.S. Catholic Bishops have a terrific overview. That overview is the source of our quotations here, and is a good reference for your pastor, fellow parishioners, or others who might be curious about how Catholic teaching relates to climate change.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops identifies *Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching*, and four are especially important in the face of climate change.

1) Life and Dignity of the Human Person

“The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching.”

The consequences of climate change—food and water scarcity, climate migration, and more frequent severe weather events—compromise human life and dignity. The World Health Organization [estimates](#) that climate change already causes 150,000 annual fatalities, and warns that further climate change could cause an additional 250,000 deaths each year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea and heat stress.

To live the Catholic value of protecting human life and dignity, we must address climate change.

Your pastor, parish council, or other leaders your Creation Care Team encounters might be curious about how Catholic teaching relates to climate change. The Church’s tradition of social teaching can provide some answers.

This overview informs you about the basics of this tradition. As always, we’d love to hear if other materials have worked well for you, and to answer any questions you might have. Please feel free to reach us at programs@catholicclimatecovenant.org if you’d like to chat.



2) Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

"A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring."

The effects of climate change disproportionately harm poor and vulnerable people. People who are living in poverty don't have the resources needed to recover from a devastating hurricane, or the resources needed to build new irrigation systems as rainfall patterns change. This is particularly unjust because the poor are often least responsible for contributing to the causes of climate change.

To live the Catholic value of caring for poor and vulnerable people, we must address climate change.

3) Solidarity

"At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace."

The Catholic vision of justice is based in the understanding that we are all children of God. As brothers and sisters, we all share the Earth as our common home. Sharing the planet well means limiting our disproportionate contribution to climate change. Sharing it with our children and grandchildren means conserving its delicately balanced systems and resources for the future.

To live the Catholic value of solidarity, we must address climate change.

4) Care for God's Creation

"Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored."

Climate change brings real changes to God's Creation. Melting glaciers, rising sea levels, and species extinction all compromise our calling to keep and till the Earth. We are servant leaders who are called to maintain Creation as we would a beautiful garden.

To live the Catholic value of caring for God's good gift of Creation, we must address climate change.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND CREATION CARE TEAMS

As a Creation Care Team leader, you have a special responsibility to help your community understand how these elements of Catholic Social Teaching relate to the call to address climate change.

The [Creation Care Resource Library](#) has lots of ideas and step-by-step guides for how to integrate Catholic Social Teaching on ecology in your community. Here are some additional ideas:

- Take a look at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' [website](#). It may bring other ideas of how to address Catholic Social Teaching and climate change to mind.
- Schedule study and discussion time on Catholic Social Teaching and climate change with your Creation Care Team and with your parish or school.
- Speak with your adult formation, catechism, and school staff about incorporating these commitments to Creation care when discussing Catholic Social Teaching.
- Share one of the above themes in the bulletin for four consecutive weeks.
- Suggest to your pastor that he give a homily about Catholic Social Teaching and Creation care. Share this overview with him.

